

# News from Councilman Steven Silverman



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Summer 1999



*Dear Friends,*

*It has been six months since I took office as Councilmember. Last January I wrote an article that appeared in the Washington Post with the headline, "Children First." I wrote that we must create a sense of urgency in tackling the most pressing needs of our kids. Even in the short months since that article, I believe we have taken concrete steps to put those words into action. With my first budget season completed, and an operating budget approved of over \$2 billion, I want to share with you some of the highlights, especially where we put "children first."*

*Steve*

## ***Education: The Three R's***

Our county's major commitment to our children is building and maintaining a world-class school system. Almost half of our operating budget, \$1 billion, will go to fund the Montgomery County School system, meeting 99.5% of the School Board's request.

We accelerated the elementary school reading initiative in grades 1 and 2, limiting reading classes to no more than 15 students. In addition, with algebra as a key gateway to upper level math courses, we provided funds to limit those grade 9 classes to 20 students.

My strong priority for next year is to work with school officials, community, and business leaders to initiate a significant multi-

year effort to reduce overall class size in the critical early grades of kindergarten through third grade.

Children and their families will have an easier time getting to the library for school projects and reading for fun as this year's budget funds more libraries to be open on Sundays.

At the other end of the school age spectrum, the Council provided funds to Montgomery College to begin an exciting joint planning effort with the University of Maryland with the goal of bringing a four-year college degree program to Montgomery County.

## Cool Kids!

Sweltering kids have a hard time learning and teachers have a challenge teaching when the temperatures soar and their school is not air-conditioned. Relief is on the way to the seventeen remaining schools without air conditioning. We challenged ourselves and the school system to make this a priority and approved over \$7 million to air condition all regular schools by Spring 2000 and all holding schools by September 2000.

## Play Ball!!!

As the Lead Councilmember for Parks and Recreation, I want to make a concerted effort to see that Montgomery County provides adequate parkland and recreational opportunities for our entire community, particularly our children. We made a great start this year. Included in our Parks and Recreation actions:

- **Over \$3 million in new funds for a major initiative to improve ballfields throughout the county.** I led the effort on the Council for more funds for ballfields, and we scored on this key recreation priority. In the first phase we'll focus on getting more out of the fields we already have. New lights, upgraded fields, and reconfigured fields will result in an extra 500 games and practices that can be played on county fields every week.
- **A Soccerplex in South Germantown Recreation Park funded through a public/private partnership with the Maryland Soccer Foundation.** When complete, this outstanding facility will have 22 outdoor soccer fields, including a championship field with spectator seating, an indoor sports facility, 4 baseball/softball fields, and 2 community use fields for football, lacrosse, soccer and other field sports. Other recreational features in the park will include a central park, group picnic area, hiking trails, adventure playground, and planning for an indoor/outdoor tennis facility, golf driving range, and miniature golf.



- **A new indoor swim center for Germantown to meet the growing demand for aquatic facilities.** With funding proposed by Councilmember Dacek and myself, I strongly hope this pool will be located in the South Germantown Park. With the addition of the indoor pool, this Park will be one of the most family-friendly places in all of Montgomery County.
- Acceleration of the **Martin Luther King Swim Center Outdoor Pool**, and the **Damascus Community Recreation Center**, both long-awaited recreation facilities.

## Protecting Our Children

Safe, healthy and ready-to-learn children are Montgomery County's most valuable renewable resource. As a member of the Health and Human Services Committee (HHS) I supported many important initiatives aimed at protecting our kids, most notably:

- An additional 22 child welfare workers will be brought onboard to relieve our child welfare staff who carry enormous caseloads but must make critical decision about the safety of our children. Nothing is more important than protecting children who are victims of abuse or neglect.
- Beginning in January 2000, *Montgomery Babies*, the successful newborn early assessment program, will be available to every baby born to county residents in *all* Montgomery County hospitals. A specially trained nurse will complete an initial assessment and those families in need of additional help or services will be linked to them.
- At my recommendation, the *Healthy Families* program will receive funds for an additional 30 families, bringing the total served to almost 150. Based on the highly regarded Hawaii Healthy Start model, *Healthy Families* will provide home visits and other services to at-risk families awaiting their first birth or with infants under three months. We know these efforts prevent future problems like child abuse.

Continued from *Protecting Our Children* . . .

- The Silver Spring Children's Mental Health Clinic will remain open for the upcoming year while we take a comprehensive look at how the public mental health system is meeting children's needs.
- An additional 125 children from needy working families will receive child care subsidies.
- As part of the Council's Children's First Initiative, I proposed a feasibility study of bringing early childhood development services into designated neighborhoods via a specially equipped and staffed bus or van. Modeled after a Nevada program, Classroom on Wheels, my staff calls this idea our version of the "Magic School Bus."



## To Your Health

The health of our whole community is dependent on the care and treatment of those most in need, and often least able to afford it. I was happy to shine the spotlight on a few of the worthwhile organizations working hard to address this problem and pleased that the Council supported my funding proposals for them.

- **Proyecto Salud**, a partnership of five community-based organizations, will be able to provide basic primary health services to over 1,000 additional language-minority clients. Without this county support, Proyecto Salud's mostly uninsured individuals would have to rely on hospital emergency room care at a greater cost to public health as well as to public coffers.
- People living with HIV/AIDS often struggle with the effort required to shop for and prepare meals that meet their different and greater nutritional needs. To ease this burden, and with county funding support for the first time, **Food and Friends** will provide comprehensive home-delivered food and other nutritional services to 110 of our neighbors (and their children) living with HIV/AIDS in Montgomery County.
- **Mobile Medical Care** is a critical source of primary care for the homeless and medically indigent. Thanks to state and county grants, this county health care provider will be able to purchase a specially equipped mobile van.

## Getting Down to Business

We must have a strong economy if our residents and businesses are to thrive and frankly, if we are going to continue to grow our tax base to fund the programs and services that enhance our county's quality of life.

The County Council approved a series of economic development budget initiatives I proposed along with my colleagues Derick Berlage and Phil Andrews, members of the Council's Planning, Housing, and Economic Development Committee.

Our package added \$775,000 in economic development funding and provided almost \$3 million in tax relief through support for repeal of the county's tax on cell phones. It includes:

- A one-stop career center to address workforce development by putting together the businesses with the job openings and the workers with skills;
- A public/private marketing initiative to attract and retain companies and promote Montgomery County;
- Funds for Montgomery Work/Life Alliance, a coalition of county businesses, organizations, and government agencies formed to promote and recognize businesses who engage in family friendly business practices.

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## ***Let's Get Moving***

Traffic too much to take? Take the bus! This year's budget funds more bus service from Shady Grove Metro and late-night bus service for those of you burning the midnight oil, working nontraditional hours, or taking advantage of the nightlife in Silver Spring or Bethesda.

Weekday shuttle bus service in both the Bethesda and Silver Spring downtown areas will allow you to visit, shop and run errands at different downtown businesses quickly and without resorting back to your car.

Still in your car? Ahead of schedule, you'll find safety improvements underway on Muncaster Mill Road and a widened Briggs Chaney Road east of US 29. Shady Grove Road will also be widened to six lanes between Briardale Drive and Muncaster Mill. Lane re-striping on many roads will further ease congestion throughout the county.

If you work in Bethesda and are tired of fighting for a parking space, ask your employer about the Super Fare Share program – allowing employers to offer additional public transportation subsidies.

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## ***Public Safety***

We will see more firefighters and paramedics, a relocated Silver Spring police station, and Montgomery Village/Gaithersburg will get a new police substation, as well as funds for training emergency communication personnel who are key to the opening of this facility.

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## ***Taxes—Relief Is on the Way***

Taxpayers will also see relief under the budget approved by the Council. Property tax rates will be reduced and we held the line on water and sewer rates with no increases for the second year in a row. I led the fight to repeal the tax on cell phones, which are no longer just a luxury but used increasingly by our residents and businesses. Finally, I was the needed “fifth” vote on the Council to reduce the local piggyback income tax from 60% of the state tax to 58%.

We need to show that when the economy is good, we will share the fruits of our citizens' labor directly with those who are providing the resources to the county.

Montgomery County Council ..... 240-777-7900  
..... FAX 240-777-7989

Animal Control ..... 301-279-1823

Building Permits ..... 240-777-6200

Bus Schedules ..... 240-777-RIDE

Business Licenses ..... 240-777-9460

Child Care ..... 301-279-1773

Circuit Court ..... 240-777-9466

Consumer Complaints ..... 240-777-3636

County Executive ..... 240-777-2500

Crisis Hotline (24 hours) ..... 301-315-4000

Emergency Police, Fire and  
Rescue ..... Dial 911

General County Info. .... 240-777-1000

Land Records ..... 240-777-9477

Library Telephone  
Reference ..... 240-777-0001

Parking Violations ..... 240-777-8960

Parks ..... 301-495-2525

Pet Licenses ..... 301-279-1095

Police (non-emergency) ..... 301/279-8000

Property Tax Information ..... 240-777-8950

Rat Complaints ..... 240-777-3986

Recreation Programs ..... 240-777-6804

Recycling Information ..... 240-777-6400

Register of Wills ..... 240-777-9600

Schools Information ..... 301-279-3391

Trash Collection ..... 240-777-6410

Voter Registration (24 hours) .... 240-777-VOTE

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## ***We've Got New Numbers!***

***That's right – all your favorite Montgomery County government agencies will have new telephone numbers. Clip and save these most-requested numbers!***